1: Ammar E, 1-5 (1951) 1954
MR13 Fellahin MR13
Silwa

one a piece of land, and to the less favoured a large piece of gold. As the first son complained about his inheritance, his dying father told him that every grain of earth he had left for him was mixed with a grain of gold, and that if he dug well enough he would be able to extract the gold from it. After a lapse of some time the less favoured one squandered his gold, while the other, by 'digging' harder and harder, added to the fertility of his land and thus prospered and was worthy of his father's love. For this reason, the latter was taken as an ideal symbol of filial piety.

As mentioned previously, to have origin in the village is also to have land, and this is reflected in the scheme of the village land. The cultivable land was divided between the descendants of 'On and Musa, the two brothers, who were the heads of the village sections.[1] It is maintained that every ten kasabas (land-measure) of land owned by 'On clansmen is followed by another ten kasabas owned by Musa clansmen. 'If you have no sahm or kirat (land-measure) handed over to you from your ancestors, then you are not a full member of your clan,' Ali stated, 'and two families had to migrate from the village to another village because they had to sell their land. It is the worst lot that can befall any person. It brings disgrace to him to abandon his father's trust, and it also means that he is sinning against his children. There are few people still in the village who have sold their land, and they are like those who have shed their clothes and remained stark naked; both are the two great shame-bringing practices.'

Yet those who are under considerable economic pressure resort to the device of 'land-pawn' which entails the owner's handing over of his land to a man in return for a comparatively large sum of money. The latter tills the land as if it was his possession, to be returned to its original owner on his payment of the debt. Another way of relieving economic distress without actually selling the land is the so-called 'conditional sale', whereupon the owner sells with option to repurchase at a given date.

If selling land is one of the worst social practices, the acquisition of land is naturally the best one. To be able to add to one's inheritance is a sign of parents' approval and content with their son's deeds as well as God's blessing. It is interesting to find children about the age of five or six singing a rhyme, telling how a chicken given to a child by his mother has enabled him in the long run to acquire a 'kirat'—one twenty-fourth of a feddan. The rhyme goes on to say, 'My mother gave me a chicken, the chicken bought me a goose, the goose bought me a small goat, the goat bought me a sheep, the sheep bought me a small donkey, the donkey bought me a cow and the cow bought me a kirat'. There is another version of the same song, differing in what the cow bought for the child, and in the other version he got a 'bride' and the bride got him a 'bridegroom—a son'.[2]

From the point of view of land tenure, the village is a typical example of

[1] See Chapter II for social structure.
[2] The rhyme is occasionally associated with bouncing the ball on the wall.

1: Ammar E, 1-5 (1951) 1954
MR13 Fellahin MR13
Silwa

LIVELIHOOD IN SILWA

It is not claimed that these figures are anything but approximate, but they at least bring out the proportionate amount of work and show clearly the labour that can be undertaken by children in this agrarian community. They reveal that a 13-year-old boy can contribute to almost two-thirds of the actual labour in the cultivation of the land (his solo contribution for the winter crop being 440 hours out of 720; and 536 hours out of 888 hours for the summer crop).

One can assess from the approximate figures the paramount importance of children as a non-salaried essential in the labour-force, especially in a community where hired labour is extremely difficult to get. Moreover, it is not difficult to appreciate the maxim that an early son is of great service. It is a part of filial piety for a son to be expected to perform all that is within his capacity to relieve his father.[1] Thus from the economic point of view, a child's process of growing up connotes his father's gradual relinquishing of all the farm tasks he has been carrying out hitherto. One of the ideals of family life is for the children to do the things their parents have been doing *before*, as he who resembles his father has committed no injustice. This criterion is one of the elements involved in describing a boy or a girl as 'muaddab' or 'muaddabah'—disciplined. If the father has grown-up children to rely upon for work, this would certainly enhance his social prestige, being able through more leisure to participate fully in the social events, mediations and informal gatherings as he can afford the time for them.

Children are thus considered to be leisure-giving to their parents; since a leisurely father is one who is not hard-pressed by work and usually designated as 'sheikh arab'. Yet sons sometimes resent the excessive indulgence of their fathers in this privilege, when they feel that they themselves are overworked, or when incited by their in-laws or 'pals' that they are working like a donkey while father is acting like 'a great arab sheikh, enjoying the shade and the councils'. In some cases, this might lead to son and father friction, which might result in the former quitting the village.

A few people in the village have land, but no sons. In connection with this, Ali remarked that this is one of the ways in which God tested his creatures, by not letting them have both land and sons. Such people have to get permanent hired labour for the cultivation of their land; and these are euphemistically dubbed 'participants'. The owner provides the animals, implements, and seeds for work, while the participants provide the labour, receiving in return a quarter of the crop. Sometimes a part of the land is let to a person, the owner having nothing to do with it, but receiving one-third, or sometimes one-half, of the total crop besides paying the tax.

The economic contribution of boys applies equally to girls in connection with the household work. Girls are expected to co-operate with mothers in domestic tasks, and, as they grow older, to be increasingly able to relieve their mothers so that the latter can widen their social activities and

[1] See in this connection children's statements in the *Moral Ideology Test*, Appendix IX.

2: Blackman E-5 (1920-1926) 1927
MR13 Fellahin MR13
Upper Egypt

goods for sale pays a small sum to the owner of the property on which the market is held.

There is no more animated scene than a village market (Fig. 95). Some of the traders bring their goods the evening before, packed in *akfâs* (plural of *kafas*) and other receptacles, and these, together with bundles of sugar-cane and the like, are deposited overnight in the market-place, being left in the charge of village guards. Others who have goods for sale begin to assemble very early in the morning, bringing sacks of onions, bundles of cotton cloths, cheap jewellery, household and kitchen utensils, tomatoes and other vegetables, as well as cattle, sheep, goats, donkeys, and camels. The butchers are usually among the first to arrive, for they slaughter the animals on the spot, hanging up the carcasses on huge wooden tripods (Fig. 95, and p. 32, Fig. 11). While thus suspended the meat is cut up, and the purchaser is able to select any special portion that he or she requires.

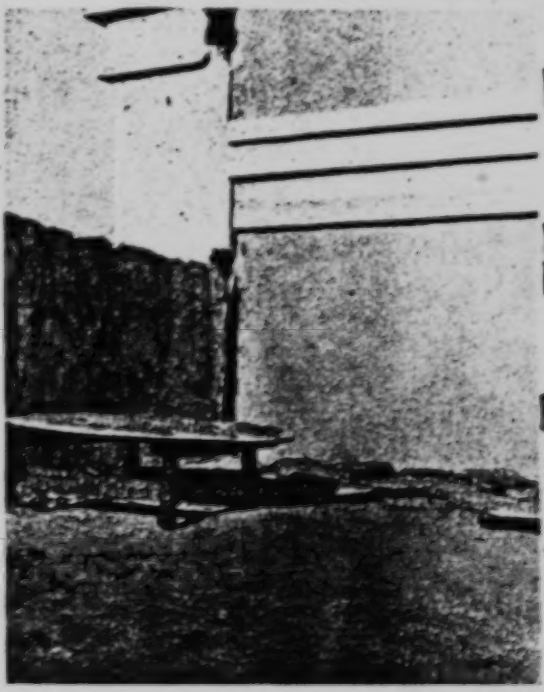

FIG. 94. LOAVES OF UNBAKED BREAD PUT IN THE SUN TO RISE

Each trade has its own particular location in the market-place, which is thus divided up into sections, such as the market of camels, the market of meat, the market of sugar-cane, and so on. Women take their full share in the business of selling, and may be

[Text continues on p. 167]

2: Blackman E-5 (1920-1926) 1927
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Upper Egypt

CHAPTER X

AGRICULTURE AND HARVEST RITES

THE wealth and prosperity of Egypt is, and always has been, dependent upon the produce of the soil, and the peasants are before everything else agriculturalists, as is also indicated by the Egyptian Arabic word for peasant—*felläḥ* (plural *felläḥin*), meaning one who digs or tills. The peasants, most of whom are quite illiterate, are remarkably clever agriculturalists, and every young boy is well versed in all that pertains to the cultivation of the soil. Their methods are, for the most part, very primitive, though, of course, the present system of storing water and of distributing it over various districts has been adopted comparatively recently, and to maintain it a number of highly trained engineers are required. This book is not concerned with these modern developments, which, indeed, lie beyond the scope of anthropology, but with the ordinary work in the fields, where ancient methods and ancient implements are still largely employed, and ancient customs are still observed.

The cultivated lands in Egypt lie along either bank of the river, without any apparent boundaries, for there are no hedges to divide the fields as in England. To the eye of the ordinary traveller there is nothing to indicate where one man's property ends and another's begins. The fields are broken up into small squares, separated from each other by ridges of earth and narrow trenches. When water is distributed over a given area it is conducted through the trenches into the square plots by making an opening through the ridges which surround them. When the plots have received their due allowance of water the openings are built up again and the stream is directed to another portion of the land.

The greater number of the peasants own or hire small plots which are marked off one from the other by boundary stones stuck into the ground at intervals of six feet or more. Many a village quarrel has arisen over these stones, the removal of a neighbour's landmark being a constant cause of disturbance. If a man, for

423 The great estates lie chiefly in Upper Egypt and in the
427 newly reclaimed areas of the Delta. They do not always remain under the same ownership, and certain estates have changed hands six times in twenty years, without, however, any variation in their methods of working.

The great landowners run their estates indirectly by the help of their *daira* and of *nâzirs* in the same way as companies such as the Kom Ombo Sugar Factories, banks such as the *Crédit Foncier* and the Land Bank, the large *wakfs* and the State Domains.

The *daira* is the town office for administration and accountancy. It makes orders and purchases, arranges advances and sales and pays the taxes.

The *nâzir*, a bailiff or agent, is the owner's representative on the estate and is the real executive, on whom the whole system depends for its working. He is as obsequious to his master as he is stern to the fellaheen. His business is to exert all possible pressure on the agricultural machinery, that is, the fellaheen, in order to increase the output. He is like a saw that cuts both ways, as his victims put it. He controls the ploughing, manuring, sowing and harvesting by a rule-of-thumb routine. However, landowners would rather rely on his experience than employ agricultural engineers, who are not yet taking the part for which they are qualified in Egyptian rural affairs.

[643] On the State Domains and the estates of the King and Princes the management is more varied. The different services are grouped in a *tefteesh* or inspectorate, and installed in an *ezba*.

361 The *ezba* is an inseparable part of the larger estates.
656 It is a homestead for the estate workers, separated from the village, and constituting a hamlet which belongs entirely to the estate owner. This arrangement, which is less than a century old, was legally established in 1913, and modified slightly in 1933.

"No *ezba* may be established on any estate without the consent of the Provincial Council, which should take into consideration the extent of the petitioner's estate, its distance from the village, and the number of farm labourers to be housed there." For the law is still valid which forbids "the building, by whosoever it may be, of any manner of dwelling upon cultivated land outside the recognised village area".

There are today more than fifteen thousand *ezbas*. Their importance and the number of their inhabitants are proportionate to the area of the estate. Some have grown into full-sized villages, but most of them depend, administratively, on the village from which they sprang. 361

Not only the houses on an *ezba*, but all the implements and machinery, too, whether ancient, like the *saqia* and the *norag*, or modern, like the pumping-engine and the threshing-machine, together with the store-houses and, more often than not, the animals, belong to the owner of the estate. If he cultivates it directly, the fellaheen are day-labourers; if not, they are usually tenants or share-croppers. In either case they are in a sense bound to the soil, and remain so in spite of changes of ownership, unless evicted for some other reason. 361 422 427

It may be that the owner has mortgaged his land. About a million feddans are thus burdened. If he cannot pay the interest, the bank forecloses. In 1935 fifty thousand feddans were thus expropriated because of debt. 427 423 425

It often happens that the holdings of the fellaheen are seized at the same moment. But who is there to discriminate? They may already have paid the Bey or the Pasha their dues, and are in no way responsible for his debts; but that is no concern of the creditors, who needs must foreclose on the mortgage.

One of the large banks had seized an *ezba* belonging to a notable of the region of Shoubra Ris, in the Markaz of Kafr-el-Zayyât. A number of lots on this *ezba* had been let out to villagers, many of whom had been living on them for upwards of twenty years. When the bank's bailiff arrived to carry out the seizure, the villagers resisted him, and the police had to interfere. The assistant chief constable of the *markaz* arrived on the scene at the head of an armed force, but was attacked by the people. Seeing that the situation promised to grow more serious, he felt himself obliged to order shots to be fired in the air to frighten the fellaheen. The effect was to exasperate them. They proceeded to cut the telephone wires and burn the bailiff's car. A new body of police soon came to the rescue, but proved as useless as the first. Finally the Mudeer appeared on the scene at the head of yet a third force and order was re-established only when fur- 427 625 579 423

427 ther shots had been fired into the air. Seven of the policemen
625 were wounded by stones thrown at them by the villagers.
579 Several villagers were arrested, and a judicial enquiry was
423 opened. This incident, which took place in 1936, is by no means abnormal. As is usual on such occasions, the landowner himself was absent.

423 The big landowner, even if he be of fellah origin — and
427 the proportion of land owned by native Egyptians is
369 ever on the increase — takes no interest in his *izba* except as a source of income. Like the absentee land lords of Irish history, or the pluralist rectors of seventeenth-century England, he goes as seldom, and stays as short a time, as possible. He knows his labourers only by the cash which his *nāzir* sends him; their families he does not know at all. Of their lives and needs as human beings and members of society he is sublimely ignorant. For the big landowner is Europeanised. He lives in Cairo or Alexandria and spends the summer in Europe. Everyone knows how prodigal he is of his wealth, the wealth of Egypt. In one evening he will fling away enough to keep his fellaheen alive for a whole year. Their poverty and his own luxury seem equally natural to him.

565 Between his men and himself there is no sort of bond.
643 He has no traditions linking him to this or that village. In Egypt today there is no landed aristocracy, only an aristocracy of wealth; and wealth gravitates to the town.

It is related that on one of his visits to the country the late King Fuad stopped to witness the songs and dances which a few fellaheen had improvised for him by the wayside. A courtly minister was astonished at this condescension and said:

'What generosity, Your Majesty, to waste ten minutes like this!'

'But for these fellaheen, Your Excellency,' replied the King, 'you would not have an income of five thousand pounds, nor be either a minister or a pasha.'

565 Contempt for the fellah has become so deep rooted in the
369 minds of his 'superiors' that the very word has become the worst of insults. Call anyone 'fellah', and it is as if you had said 'lout', 'scum', or even worse. Among the rich there is often complete indifference to the fellaheen. For them

461
465 the produce of the vegetable patch, or a present of maize.

The Fellah as Share-Cropper

427 As day labourer the fellah works on large properties, as
465 *mdayer* or share-cropper on a small plot of five or at most ten feddans. Under this system the owner enters into partnership with the fellah as follows:

The owner pays the taxes and irrigation dues, provides the farm implements, cattle, seed and manure. The fellah, as head of a family, provides labour for all the year's crops, from ploughing to harvest. For this he receives a fifth or a quarter of the yield of his plot. He may also bear half the expenses, in which case he takes half the crop. The contract is always verbal, and varies in detail.

This system involves no risk as it guarantees the owner a maximum of work, and the fellah his livelihood. It cannot, however, be very profitable to the fellah, because even if he labours continuously with every possible aid from his family he cannot manage to work more than five feddans. At the end of the year he has only the produce of one or one and a quarter feddans, that is to say about L.E. 12, for the efforts of his whole family over twelve months. In a bad year he will have less to show even than this. Finding
[426] himself short of money before harvest, he goes to the owner for an advance to buy a *gallabiya*, or pay the expenses of a circumcision or a funeral. Such loans, with their interest, sometimes come to more than his part of the bargain. In this case he will not only receive nothing when accounts come to be settled, but in addition his work will be already pledged for the following year.

The Fellah as Tenant Farmer

427 To rent land outright is more adventurous. The tenant takes a field at a fairly high rent, from L.E. 6 to L.E. 22 a feddan according to the district; he pays all expenses, but keeps all the produce. The owner is responsible only for taxes. The lease is long, and usually covers the full rotation of crops over two or three years.

For example a fellah of the rich district of Mit-Ghamr rents two feddans at L.E. 20 for the agricultural year. He
[243 plants one with cotton, which produces 4 *cantars* (31), each
248] worth about L.E. 3½. The cotton goes to the owner, making L.E. 14 towards the rent. On the other feddan he sows

part *berseem*, and part wheat for the winter. The *berseem* is consumed by his cattle, the wheat produces 2½ *ardebs*, selling at about L.E. 6, but the landowner keeps back L.E. 4 of this as the second instalment of rent.

The tenant then plants his maize for the *nili* crop on his two feddans, but before the harvest he must pay the balance of his rent (L.E. 2) to the owner, and can then take the maize for himself. In fact it is only the yield of this last crop which really belongs to the fellah and his family. After setting aside enough to feed his family, he sells what is left. If all goes well he may be about L.E. 6 to the good.

But all may not go well. If the crop has been poor, or there was a blight, or the crop has been badly sold, the tenant must still pay the full rent, as provided in Article 392 of the Egyptian Civil Code. Ruin is the result. Sometimes (e.g. in the three years from 1929 to 1932) catastrophe has been so general that the Government has had to issue decrees for the reduction of rent in a proportion of 25% to 40% according to the date of contract. The State cannot always intervene, and owing to the keen demand land is rarely let except at high rents. The consequences for the fellah are frequently disastrous.

One unhappy tenant farmer, whose *gamoossa* had just been seized, explained the situation to an inquirer in these words:

"I hired two feddans at L.E. 12 apiece. On each I spent L.E. 5 in seeds, manures and so on, not to mention my labour, that of my children, and the help of my animals throughout the year. What is the result? One feddan yielded four *cantars* of cotton, which sold at L.E. 12. The other produced five *ardebs* of corn and seven of maize, which brought me L.E. 13. Out of this L.E. 25 I had already spent L.E. 10, so how could I pay my rent of L.E. 24? I had to sell the *gamoossa*."

"But if you only lose, why continue to rent land?"

"Because farming is the job I learnt from my fathers, and I don't know how to do anything else."

"But why rent land at such a high price?"

"Because the local landowners have conspired to keep the prices up, and the fellaheen do not know how to get them lowered."

427 511 Then he added, "Since everything we had has been taken from us, we will steal." (")

The Fellah as Landowner

423 554 183 We have seen that more than two million fellaheen possess a patch of land each. Four fifths of this number own a plot so small — from two kirats to one feddan — as not to suffice a family for either employment or support. Nevertheless among the rural proletariat these small landowners are the 'privileged class'. It is every fellah's ideal to get land, as it is to marry, have children, and own a *gamoossa*.

183 651 452 The owner of a small field has the same things to buy as a tenant: seed, manure, animals and implements (these last usually in partnership with others). He has no rent to pay, but is liable for taxes, and usually interest on debts. The fellah is a poor hand at finance, and rarely has any savings; he borrows money to buy seed or fertilisers, to rent a neighbouring field which will round off his patch, or even, instead of paying off his debts, to buy it.

452 427 Since the banks do not lend small sums, he borrows from private persons, who, in spite of the 1912 Law limiting the maximum interest to 10%, lend him at 30% or even 50%. The interest, if not the debt itself, has to be paid. However hard he works, himself and all his family, in an effort to make his field produce its utmost with the least possible expenditure, he is almost always caught on the wrong leg when the payment falls due. Then he has to hand over all the fruits of his labour, or else sell part of his land.

There is a law (of December 3, 1912) which forbids seizure of the 'homestead', that is to say, five feddans or less. This law, by denying the banks any guarantee for their loans, has prevented smallholders from benefiting by the legal means of credit, and thrown them into the hands of moneylenders.

The fellah must have credit. As often as not, by his own fault, he does not know how to make his loans pay; the harsh terms engulf him deeper and deeper in debt, and the more he borrows the worse he fares. Land debts are like a cancer devouring the small landowner (").

423 432 However, the fellah who owns land is, in name at least, owner of its products, especially of the cotton, which the

432 in the village, while the *Crédit Agricole* takes it at only 150 kg.
434 as in the cities, and advances 130 piastres (1937 prices) on each *ardeb*.

Your cunning merchant proceeds to deposit the wheat, which he pretends to have harvested, in the *shoonas* of the bank. He thus gains 10 piastres and 25 kilogrammes of wheat on each *ardeb* bought, and without assuming any risks himself can confidently expect an additional premium at the time of sale by the *Crédit Agricole*.

461 There are no walls but only low ridges or channels
464 dividing the fields of Egypt. In the same way there is no sharp division between the various kinds of labour which we have just been analysing. None of these categories is self-sufficient, and each overlaps the next. There are few fellaheen who do not pass from one to another, or belong at the same time to two of them. The very conditions of the fellah's life imply a certain similarity in them all.

181 (1) *Poverty*. Because he knows nothing of either fore-
511 sight or economy, and even more because he is weak, isolated and ignorant, the strong and the rich reap the fruits of his labours. The bank or the moneylender, the Government, the *omda*, or the landowner, gathers in most, if not all, of what he has sweated to produce. He himself, to use one of his own sayings, remains "poor as a needle, which clothes others but itself remains unclad".

427 (2) *Dependence*. The fellah can plant neither what he
466 wishes nor when he wishes. As a day-labourer he works
656 in a gang at a definite task under the strictest supervision. As tenant farmer or share-cropper he plants his crops according to the owner's plan. As landowner he is dependent with regard to dates and choice of crops on the orders of the Ministry of Agriculture. He has no sort of liberty or initiative one way or the other.

511 (3) *The minimum standard*. However bad his affairs may be, the fellah is at least certain of his daily bread. No-one actually starves to death in the country; for even under the worst conditions of labour the natural resources of the land remain.

574 (4) *Family Labour*. The help given to the fellah by his family must never be lost sight of. Among the Egyptian peasantry, wife, children, *gamoossa* and donkey make up